ADOLF HITLER:

MESSIAH OR MADMAN

by

JOHN HAYNES HOLMES

Price, Ten Cents

THE COMMUNITY CHURCH
NEW YORK CITY

12

[Rare]
DD
247
H5
H657
1934

The Community Pulpit

Series 1933 - 1934 — No. V

THE COMMUNITY PULPIT is published annually in a series of ten numbers, each containing a full sermon or address. The subscription price is one dollar ($1), postpaid. Apply to the Secretary, Church Office, 550 West 110th Street, New York City.

ADOLF HITLER: MESSIAH OR MADMAN

AM to speak to you this morning about Adolf Hitler, the dictator of Nazi Germany. More particularly I am proposing to speak to you about Hitler's revelation of his own character and statement of his own case in his autobiography, which has just been published in this country under the title, "My Battle."

I am justified in dealing with this subject, and in asking your time and attention for its consideration, by reason of the fact that the rise of Hitler to a position of supreme power is one of the most amazing and significant phenomena of modern times. The story of this rise—from a position of utter obscurity in the ranks of the German army to the dictatorial leadership of one of the three most important European nations, all achieved in a period of a little over a dozen years—this story, I say, is one of the few things which Adolf Hitler makes plain in the astonishing phantasmagoria of nonsense which makes up the substance of his book. Let us look at this story for a moment as a kind of lifting of the curtain on the main drama!

At the close of the Great War, Adolf Hitler was a lance corporal in a veteran regiment in Munich. One day, under orders from military headquarters, he went to a meeting of the German Workers' Party, to see what was going on and to make report to his official superiors. It was a meeting of only a few people, at which a discourse was de-

livered by a certain Gottfried Feder, who was later destined to be very prominent in the Nazi movement. Hitler was dragged into the discussion of the little group; and two days later, to his vast astonishment, he received a notice that he had been admitted as a member of the Party, and an invitation to attend a committee meeting on the following Wednesday evening. More out of bravado than anything else, so far as I can make out, Hitler joined the organization, and, again to his astonishment, was given a ticket of membership which bore the number "7." The German Workers' Party, in other words, was so utterly insignificant in 1919 that it only had six members!

Nevertheless, this marked the turning point of Hitler's career and the beginning of his phenomenal rise to leadership in his country and in the world. "In the earliest days of the movement," he tells us in his book, the Party suffered not only from the fact that the members were so few, but also from the further fact that the names of these members "carried no importance, and were unknown." But they decided, soon after Hitler had joined them, to have a public meeting. Invitations were partly typed and partly written by hand on little pieces of paper. The members went out to distribute these tickets from hand to hand, from door to door; Hitler tells us that he remembers delivering as many as eighty. Anxiously they awaited the evening of the appointed date, and then, when it came, made ready to receive the crowd. But after waiting an hour beyond the scheduled time, the chairman had to begin, with nobody in attendance but the original six members and Adolf Hitler.

Undiscouraged the dauntless seven tried again. This

time they subscribed a little money to a joint fund and managed to publish an advertisement in a Munich newspaper. The success of this meeting, says Hitler, with the only touch of humor which I have been able to discover in his book, "was amazing. At seven o'clock there were one hundred and eleven persons present when the meeting began." A collection plate was passed, and three hundred marks were contributed for expenses—a sum, by the way, which is considerably in excess per person of what is contributed here at the Town Hall for the expenses of *our* meetings! A month later another meeting was held, attended this time by two hundred persons. A month later still, there were four hundred persons present. At last, on February 24, 1920, a great mass meeting was held with an audience of two thousand people, which prompts Hitler to say, in remembrance of that wonderful night, that his "heart nearly burst with joy."

This was the beginning of the great Nazi movement, which at this time was still unknown outside the borders of the city of Munich. But the spark had been kindled; it was fanned into flame by Hitler's breath, which was that of the greatest demagogic orator since Danton; and soon it became a conflagration which swept the entire country from end to end. It was about five years ago that the world woke up to discover that it had a great fire on its hands. Thus, in May, 1928, the National Socialists, as they were now called, won 12 seats in the Reichstag. In September, 1930, they won 107 seats, with a popular vote of 6,400,000. In March, 1932, when Hitler ran for the presidency of the Republic, he received 11,340,000 votes, which were enough to deny the necessary constitutional majority to any candidate; and in the run-off elec-

tion, in April, though defeated by von Hindenburg, he received a grand total of 13,418,000 votes. One year later, in March, 1933, the Nazis won an electoral majority of 17,280,000 votes, which made Hitler the dictator of the realm. And last Sunday, after smashing all the opposition parties and crushing out all the minority groups, the dictator received in the great national referendum on the League of Nations issue a total of almost ninety-three per cent of all the votes cast in Germany. If there is any rise to political power in modern history to compare with this, I do not happen to know what it is. Lenin came to power amid the chaos of a vast revolutionary upheaval, when anything was possible. Mussolini came to power through a single audacious stroke aimed straight and sure at the tottering fabric of a feeble government. Hitler came to power by strictly constitutional methods—by organizing a political party and appealing to the people for their support. It was the victory of a single man, of a great man, whose enormous power of popular leadership the world has been all too slow to recognize at its essential worth. I believe that Professor Calvin Hoover is substantially correct in his judgment when he says in his book, "Germany Enters the Third Reich," the best volume on the subject now available, that "as one surveys the series of events . . . one is compelled to admire Hitler's brilliant strategy, and to recognize that here is genius."

It is perhaps this element of genius, always so strange and unaccountable, which has led to such extravagant and contradictory opinions about Adolf Hitler. The reactions in Germany and elsewhere have of course been various—as various as the people who have looked upon this man as they might look upon some flaming portent in the sky.

But on the whole we may say that there have been substantially two reactions, the one mainly inside of Germany, the other mainly outside of Germany, which have run to extremes in diametrically opposite directions.

On the one hand, inside of Germany, we find Hitler acclaimed by the great masses of the people as a Messiah. Almost incredible is the laudation that is being bestowed today upon this expatriated Austrian by the German people. He is always referred to in public, for example, not by his name, but by the Messianic title of "Der Führer." In private his name is familiarly used in greeting and salutation, as for example, at the end of a telephone conversation, which is now closed with the cry, "Heil Hitler." His words are received as though they were the inspired utterances of a prophetic oracle, to be scrupulously heeded and obeyed. In the recent election, according to a dispatch in the New York *Times,* two reputable citizens of Berlin were standing before a loud-speaker in a public square, listening to the broadcast of Hitler's closing appeal to the German voters. After a while these men walked away, whereupon they were promptly arrested on the charge of irreverence for not having given ear to the dictator's address to the end. As a kind of climax of adulation, it is not uncommon to find pictures of Hitler in homes, store windows, and public halls, placed side by side with pictures of Jesus Christ, just as in many churches and cathedrals of Germany, the swastika may be seen side by side with the sacred cross.

All this seems ridiculous, but is easy to understand. It is simply one more instance of human nature, working as human nature has always worked since the beginning of the world. For where did the Messianic idea come

from? Why, from the very Jews, whom Hitler so cruelly despises, in the days when they were crushed beneath the iron heel of the conqueror. Through long generations the Jews had been beaten, downtrodden, and oppressed. They had suffered every injury, been visited by every indignity and humiliation. As time went on with no relief, and as they saw no escape from the misery which overwhelmed them, these Jews began to dream of the coming of a mighty man, a Prince of the House of David, who would lift them up, and restore them, and make them great once more among the nations of the earth. Do you not see the parallel to Germany and the Germans? This country also has been beaten in war and degraded in peace. These people also have been insulted, disgraced, and outraged. And these also have seen no escape from their wretched plight. In the one case as in the other, you get a certain condition of popular psychology—an emotional pathology on the part of men who lift themselves out of the depths of irreparable despair by a kind of wild and extravagant faith that by some miracle they will be delivered. The Messiah will come! And lo, here he is—this master orator of Munich, who by the magic of his speech can weave as it were a spell over the sanest mind and the coldest heart. This man's message, says Professor Deisserman, Vice Chancellor of the University of Berlin, came to the students of Germany, and to the people generally, "like an apocalyptic vision." Hitler was their hope, their promise, their assurance—the incarnate vision of their suppressed dream of Germany delivered. He was the leader, "Der Führer," who like another Moses, if the comparison may be used in this case, would take them out of their bondage, and bring them, through whatever wildernesses, to

the Promised Land. Curious, how this idea could spread—and yet nothing more natural! So natural that it captured not only the mind of the populace, but Hitler's mind as well. He also became convinced that he was the German Messiah. Note, for example, that illuminating statement in his autobiography, where he tells of his discovery that the Jews were the enemies of Germany and that he must fight for their destruction. "Thus did I now believe," he says, "that I must act in the sense of the Almighty Creator. . . . I am doing the Lord's work."

This is one side of the picture. The other side, seen mostly outside of Germany, is the conviction that Hitler is not a Messiah at all but a madman. Critics of Nazi Germany are not timid about saying what they think about the leader of the National Socialists. Professor Hoover, sanest and most objective of observers, while recognizing Hitler's "genius," goes on to describe him as a "fanatic," thereby inevitably suggesting that once again is genius near akin to madness. Mr. Matthew Josephson, author of distinguished biographies of Rousseau and Emile Zola, trained student of biographical material, declares that the utterances of Adolf Hitler in his autobiography can only be interpreted as the words of a "neurasthenic." Mr. Lewis Gannett, well known reviewer of books for the New York *Herald Tribune,* rising from a reading of "My Battle," gives it as his considered opinion that the book "sounds as if written in a madhouse," and states that Hitler himself can only be described as a "war-crazed maniac." Mr. Robert Dell, one of the ablest and most experienced of European newspaper correspondents, writing in the New York *Nation,* asserts categorically that the Nazi leader is "a criminal lunatic."

Here, now, are two widely divergent opinions of this one astonishing man. They seem, at first sight, to be so far apart as to be mutually exclusive. Yet on further consideration they may be found to be so near together as to be coincident, for a Messiah is not seldom of the lunatic type, like the famous Mad Mullah, and, *per contra,* a lunatic has not seldom dreamed himself to be a Messiah. In trying to find the truth, we are fortunate in having Hitler's own book, the autobiography, written in 1924, when the author was in prison, and revised again and again in many subsequent editions. Here we have the whole mind of the man as it originally appeared, and as it has developed through the years of its intensest activity. What does it reveal?

Before I attempt an answer to this question, I must say a word about "Mein Kampf" as we have it in translation. This translation is not an English version of the original—as a matter of fact, the English text contains not even a third of the original. Two hundred and fifty thousand German words have been reduced to something like eighty thousand English words. Our book, therefore, is not the book that Hitler wrote, and is most certainly not "the historical document" which the publishers so loudly proclaim it to be. Persons who have carefully examined both texts, the original and the translation, as I have not, seem to agree upon certain definite conclusions:

First, the book has lost in translation a certain magniloquence and abandon, a histrionic frenzy characteristic of the orator. The translation, or rather revision, has toned the book down, and thus has completely altered its spirit. This may be the reason why, as it appears in our language, it is so intolerably dull.

Secondly, the book has gained in translation a certain orderliness and precision. Our English version is more compact, coherent, and rational than the German. It is less rambling, less absurd, less wildly and bloodthirstily extravagant. The translator has evidently done his best to make the author appear sane.

Thirdly, and most seriously, the English book simply does not contain the most revealing and therefore most important passages of the original. Whole sections of the German text have been cut out altogether, and thus the English reader is denied those very portions of the book which are most illuminating. Let me give you some specific examples of what we are missing!

Thus, the German text contains a furious tirade against Free Masonry. For some reason which I do not pretend to understand, Hitler has brought the whole great body of the Masons under his sweeping condemnation. This attack has almost entirely disappeared from the English version.

The German text has exultant references to Japan as the one nation which has proved itself to be impervious to the pestilential "international Jewish influence." These references are missing from the English text.

The original work contains amazing passages about the character and use of propaganda. Hitler makes an avowal, in his personal confessions, of a deliberate and shameless misuse of the public mind for party purposes. Thus, he declares that "all propaganda . . . should adapt its intellectual level to the respective ability of the least intellectual of those whom it is desired to address. It must sink its mental elevation deeper in proportion to the numbers of the mass whom it has to grip." By such use of propaganda appeal, he goes on to say, "the people can be

made to see paradise as hell, and hell as paradise." For reasons not difficult to understand, these passages have been omitted from the English translation.

The German work contains an open avowal of faith in the famous Protocols of Zion. I have no time this morning to describe these Protocols which have played so large a part in the history of modern anti-Semitism. Suffice it to say that they have been proved, beyond any manner of doubt, to be a complete and perfect "fake." Hitler believes in them, and his American publishers, apparently, do not want us to know it.

One of the most shocking sections of the German work has to do with the patriotism of the Jews during the years of the Great War. In this heroic struggle for Germany, as we know, more than twelve thousand young Jews laid down their lives upon the field of battle. Many other thousands were more or less seriously wounded. Jewish youth, in other words, bore its full share of the agony and sacrifice of Germany's fight against her enemies. It is this noble fact which Hitler seizes upon as a device for attacking the Jews with almost incredible ferocity. Listen to this passage, as it appears in the German text: "If at the beginning of the war, twelve or fifteen thousand of these corrupters of the people (i.e., the Jews!) had been held under poison gas, then the sacrifice of millions at the front would not have been in vain. Twelve thousand Jewish scoundrels removed at the right time might have saved the lives of a million proper Germans of value for the future." Does it not mean something that this passage should have been entirely removed from the English translation?

More disgusting still is Hitler's indictment of the Jews for the practice of prostitution. He declares in his auto-

biography that prostitution is specifically a Jewish industry. He asserts that Jewish women are peculiarly of the prostitute type. He draws a vivid picture of "the dark-haired Jewish youth, who lies in wait for hours, satanic joy on his face, for the unwitting girl whom he dishonors with his blood." It is significant that nothing of all this appears in our American edition of the book.

A ridiculous and yet particularly wicked passage in the original has to do with Hitler's entirely serious recommendation that all the young men in Germany should wear "shorts." This seems to be an extraordinary idea, but Hitler has a reason! He declares that if all these young men were obliged to wear "shorts," the German women would be able to discover the spindle-shanked and bow-legged extremities of the Jewish youth. As a result, it would be impossible for these young Semites to seduce so many German girls. This comment would seem to cast quite as definite a reflection upon the virtue of German maidens as upon the physique of Jewish young men. Perhaps the translator of Hitler's text had some good taste, if not entire honesty, in eliminating this loathsome passage from his English version.

These and many other equally significant sections of Hitler's autobiography do not appear, as I have said, in the edition now available to the American public. But there is enough left to show with perfect clearness what kind of a man this Adolf Hitler is. In coming to my statement of what the book means in this regard, I have to confess that I have missed not only these excised passages, but also those passages in the English translation which I did not myself read. As a matter of fact, I found the book too stupid to read through to the end. Had I perused

every page, I believe I would not have been in the pulpit this morning at all, but probably in a hospital. Not in years have I tried to study a volume which was so unendurable from the standpoint of intellectual interest and spiritual self-respect. For the book is not only dull, it is also intolerably repulsive. It is ugly, disgusting, shameless. It is obscene not in the popular but in the accurate sense of that loathsome word. More and more, as I went on in my reading, I found myself agreeing with Matthew Josephson, who declared in his review of the autobiography, in the *Saturday Review of Literature,* that it could only be described as the "drivelings of an intoxicated school-boy." You know as well as I what gets into the mind of a school-boy; I leave you to imagine what comes out when the school-boy is intoxicated. In the end, I found myself comparing my impressions of Hitler's book with my impressions some years ago of the writings of Nicolai Lenin, the immortal revolutionist of Russia. In both cases I sought to know the writings of a man, in order that I might know the man. I can still today feel the vividness of the experience which first brought me into contact with that colossal intellect which made Lenin incomparably the greatest statesman of his time. Here was a mind which took the stupendous work of Karl Marx, and recreated it into the fashion of a new political philosophy, and then recreated it afresh into the living substance of the Soviet state. As compared with the writings of this man, the writings of Hitler seem not even to be worthy of the description of "drivelings." They reach a depth of stupidity and insanity, to say nothing of sheer indecency, which it seems absolutely impossible to recon-

cile with the mind of a man who stands today as the adored leader of a great people.

But it is high time that we turned to the book! What does it show? What kind of a man is telling his tale in this autobiography? Certain things, it seems to me, are perfectly plain:

First, I am persuaded, from the reading of "My Battle," that Hitler is absolutely honest. This man is not a hypocritical and scheming villain. He is not in any sense an Iago, but rather a Macbeth. I can see no evidence that Hitler is attempting to trick anybody, least of all himself. On the contrary, I seem to find, even in the dullest passages, a note of real sincerity. One or two chapters are impressive. There is that passage, for example, where Hitler describes the moment when he first "realized," as he puts it, that all the leaders of the Social Democratic Party were Jews. Incidentally, this does not happen to be true, but Hitler became convinced that it was true. At this point, he says, "scales, as it were, began to fall from my eyes. My long mental struggle was at an end." I believe this to be the characteristic confession of an honest man. Hitler was himself genuinely deceived, and is not trying to convey any deception to other men.

Secondly, Hitler's book reveals that he is incredibly ignorant. His ignorance is abysmal in depth and well-nigh universal in range. He says repeatedly in his autobiography that he gave himself carefully to the study of this, that, or the other question. But nowhere does there appear the slightest evidence that he studied anything, or even so much as read a book in all his life. Nothing is more significant than the fact that he is altogether unaware of the complete absurdity of many of his ideas. He

simply has no information, even of the kindergarten grade, to check the extravagance of his notions. He knows nothing.

Thirdly, I am convinced that Adolf Hitler has great ability in his own field, which is the field of demagoguery. He has mastered the secret of the popular mind, and with amazing shrewdness has adapted his methods to the understanding of this secret. In this way he has developed an art of public appeal and leadership which is almost satanic in its cleverness, and thus dangerous beyond description. I know of nothing more important at this moment than that we should estimate this man at his true worth. It is not too much to say that he manifests the most effective qualities of demagoguery that the world has known in all the long period from Catiline to Danton.

Fourthly, Hitler is the complete fanatic. This word, "fanatic," is the word which is used by Calvin B. Hoover in his extraordinarily moderate and careful analysis of the man's character. Professor Hoover emphasizes Hitler's amazing power to persuade men to his point of view, and to win them to agreements of plan and policy. Again and again, he says, men who have come into his power, like flies caught in a spider's web, have waked up too late to discover that Hitler had misled them. This is "not merely cleverness," says Professor Hoover, but a species of self-deception which enables him at will to believe anything which at the moment appears convenient to have others believe, and to convince these others of this belief. Here is the true fanatic—the man who convinces others when he has convinced himself! This is sincerity, coupled with utter unreliability.

Fifthly, it is apparent in Hitler's book that he has lived for years in an absolutely unreal world, a world full of mirages and fantasies. His mind is intensely occupied with ideas which have no correspondence with the world of fact. His world is his own world, which he has created out of the fantastic substance of his distorted dreams. He moves in a scene which has no actual existence, and thus builds statesmanship on the foundation of sheer delusion. For example, he has believed for years that the German Socialists are Jews, and the Jews are Socialists or Communists. He is persuaded that the Jews lost the War—that the German armies were victorious on every front and were driven to defeat only because they were stuck in the back by Jewish traitors. He thinks that the Jews wrote the Versailles Treaty, and imposed it upon Germany for their own fell purposes. He is beset by the fixed idea that Jews are a racial and not a religious group —that their religion has been from the beginning a deliberate sham, dishonestly used to conceal their essential racial character and thus cloak them in their hidden designs for racial intermixture with other peoples. He cherishes the utterly absurd notion that the Aryans are a pure race, whose repeated intermingling with other people has not permanently affected their racial integrity. These are only a few of the delusions which crowd his mind, like the fancies of a lunatic.

Sixthly, Hitler's book shows that he has perfectly definite maniacal symptoms. I mean by this that he is possessed by manias which can be technically identified by any competent student of the subject. Thus, from his earliest days as the son of an obscure middle-class official, and a humble citizen of Austria, he has been the victim

of a dangerously abnormal inferiority complex. He has the persecution complex fully developed — the kind of complex you see in the pitiful person who comes to you distracted because somebody is putting poison in his food, or lying in wait on the next corner to kill him, or invading his bedroom at night to torture him. Hitler's persecution complex centers upon the Jews, and stands as the real basis of his furious anti-Semitism. Of course, he has the Messiah complex, as I have already made plain. Also. there are paranoiac tendencies which may not inconceivably lead to disastrous consequences to himself and to his nation.

I can best indicate what I mean by these maniacal symptoms when I state, as a final point, that Hitler's book makes plain a certain ferocity of character, a certain violence of temper, which is terrifying to any sensitive reader. Critic after critic speaks of the "bloodthirstiness" of the man. He is no murderer in any personal sense, but in him are those seeds of violence which have not unnaturally produced the harvest of horrors which have accompanied the Hitler terror in Germany from the first hour of its triumph.

Such is Hitler, as revealed in his autobiography! May I sum up my impressions of the man by saying that what we have in this German dictator is the ablest and most dangerous demagogue that has appeared in history at least since the days of the French Revolution. The menace of Hitler is obvious—first, because of what he is in himself, and, secondly, because of the mastery he has gained over a people who accept him frankly, almost ecstatically, on his own Messianic valuation. It is the combination here which is the really terrible thing. On the one hand, a

people who are themselves abnormal, defeated in a war which tortured them almost beyond endurance, degraded by a peace which was the most cruel since the peace Rome forced upon Carthage, ruined by the revolution, ruined anew by the inflation, and again by the world depression, despised and outlawed from the society of western nations, denied justice and even pity, these people have lived through years of agony which have at last reduced them to a veritable craze for relief and revenge. On the other hand, as the second factor of this combination to which I refer, there appears this man, who matches perfectly the necessities and passions of the land he leads. What we face, to sum it all up, is a nerve-wracked and distracted nation, determined not only to survive but to regain its former greatness, dominated by a ferocious fanatic who may easily wreck the world in some mad frenzy of national or racial ambition.

What are we to do in the face of such a situation as this? I do not know! I have sought this morning only to submit to you the facts, and I must leave with you the probem of how to deal with them. Various remedies are possible. We may watch and wait, trusting that Hitler, sobered by the responsibilities of office, will become moderate and perhaps sane. We may do what an influential body of public opinion in France is advocating at this moment—namely, invade Germany before she becomes armed anew, seize Hitler as Napoleon was seized a hundred years ago, and banish him to some remote island of the seas. We may strangle him, as we would slowly strangle a serpent, by the imposition of a political, economic and social boycott, which I would advocate as a last desperate resort, but alas, it must be admitted, will

strike more easily, directly, and disastrously at the unoffending people than at the man who misleads and betrays them. I know not whether these or other remedies should be resorted to. Perhaps it is enough that at this moment we should ponder the situation I have described, and then remember, for our own spiritual health, that this is the consequence of the policy our world has practised since the Versailles peace. Hitler, Messiah or madman, or both, may perhaps best be understood as the punishment of our sins. He is the scourge of God laid upon us for our offenses. We have wrought this wrong upon a whole people, who now in their helplessness and mania turn unconsciously and rend us. If Hitler has come, it is because we have conjured him up and given him place in our world, to wrack it and perhaps destroy it forever. I personally can see but a single hope, and that is that we may yet be just, and pitiful, before it is too late. Thus, by our repentance, and the fruits meet for repentance, may we save Germany and the world from even that fate which seems all too dreadfully to impend upon us.

01 0001 0136 1988